

Ships at a distance: African-American women of Vigo County

Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (NEA 2017 Big Read) helped the author overcame barriers in America towards the understanding and appreciation of African-American culture. Likewise, these three Vigo County women overcame similar barriers between the 1920s and 1940s during an era of extreme racial division.

Evangeline Harris Merriweather

A nationally known educator, Evangeline Harris Merriweather was renowned for her role in establishing a greater appreciation for African-American role models in youth education by identifying black role models through biographical sketches. A descendant of a pioneer family of Vigo County, Merriweather was also renowned as a professionally trained soprano singer.

Willa Beatrice Brown

In the 1930s when it was difficult enough for women to become pilots, let alone African-American women, Willa Beatrice Brown beat the odds and became the first African-American woman pilot. Through the Coffey School of Aeronautics, she trained hundreds of pilots. One of her major goals was to get black aviation cadets into the military.

Jane Dabney Shackelford

Clarksville, Tennessee native Jane Dabney Shackelford was a very gifted teacher at Booker T. Washington School in Terre Haute but found little inspiration for African-American children in the curriculum. She set out about to change that through her master's work at Columbia University, her civic engagement, and life-long commitment to education in Terre Haute schools.